

Legislation follows McNerney's recent trip to Afghanistan

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Washington, D.C. – Following a recent bi-partisan congressional delegation trip to Afghanistan, Congressman McNerney (CA-11) yesterday reintroduced the Combat Operations and Medical Benefit Authorization for our Troops (COMBAT) Act, legislation to increase hazardous duty, imminent danger, family separation and other types of military specialty pay.

“I recently traveled to Afghanistan as part of a bi-partisan congressional delegation to see first-hand the situation on the ground, meet with U.S. military officials, Afghan leaders and servicemembers,” said Rep. McNerney. “Many of the servicemembers who I spoke with shared the struggles they face providing for their families while away from home and in the midst of grueling conditions.”

“Raising pay for servicemembers who encounter injuries, hazardous duty and separation from their families is simply the right thing to do. Some of these types of pay haven’t been raised in years,” continued Rep. McNerney.

“Also included is an increase in the payment rate for military psychologists. Ensuring that the military can retain quality psychologists is critically important to providing care for servicemembers and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health concerns,” said Rep. McNerney.

According to a 2008 RAND Corporation study, approximately 18.5 percent of servicemembers who return from Afghanistan and Iraq have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression and 19.5 percent report having experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Only about half of those who experience these conditions seek treatment. Of those who do receive treatment only slightly more than half get minimally adequate care. Based on these statistics, approximately 300,000 veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD and major depression and about 320,000 may have experienced a TBI during deployment.

The COMBAT Act was recently endorsed by Veterans of Modern Warfare (VMW), a service organization that focuses on assistance to veterans with military service from 1990 through the present. Donald Overton, the Executive Director of VMW, offered these words of support for the Congressman’s bill.

“On behalf of the national membership of Veterans of Modern Warfare (VMW), I am pleased to support the efforts of Rep. McNerney and applaud his leadership in sponsoring the COMBAT Act which will more adequately compensate our men and women in uniform serving our great

nation abroad,” said Donald Overton, VMW Executive Director. “This legislation acknowledges the tremendous sacrifices made by our Armed Forces as they continue to serve in the most dangerous and hostile global environments.”

Rep. McNerney’s bill increases eight types of military specialty pay, many of which have not been increased for several years. They are:

1. Hostile Fire and Imminent Danger

- Hostile Fire Pay is for service members exposed to hostile fire or explosion of hostile mines. Increases from \$225 to \$600 per month.
- Imminent Danger Pay is for service members serving in specifically designated places deemed to pose a threat of physical harm or imminent danger due to insurrection, war, or terrorism. Increases from \$225 to \$350 per month.

Note: Hostile Fire and Imminent Danger pay cannot be collected simultaneously.

2. Family Separation Pay

Partial reimbursement for those involuntarily separated from their dependents for extra expenses that result from such separation. Increases from \$250 to \$450 per month.

3. Special Warfare Officer Continuation Pay

A service member may be paid a retention bonus of up to \$20,000, an increase from \$15,000, for each year of retention of that service member.

4. Hazardous duty pay

This specialty pay is available to service members who encounter particularly hazardous types of duty, including:

- frequent and regular participation in aerial flight as a crew member;
- parachute jumping as an essential part of military duty;
- explosive demolition as a primary duty, including training for that duty;
- the testing of aircraft or missile systems (or components of such systems) during which highly toxic fuels or propellants are used, or the handling of chemical munitions (or components of such munitions);

Hazardous duty pays range from \$150 to \$450 per month of which service members can receive up to three per month. Rep. McNerney’s legislation raises each type of hazardous duty pay by \$50.

5. Combat-Related Injury & Rehabilitation Pay

Service members who were medically evacuated out of a combat zone and considered “hospitalized” are entitled this type of pay. Increases from \$430 to \$600 per month.

6.□□ □ Psychologists and Non-physician health care provider specialty pay

Pay for psychologists and other types of medical professionals who treat members of the military. The same RAND study referenced above found that DoD salaries for civilian psychologists and social workers are not competitive with rates provided in the civilian market, or the VA system, which increases the “likelihood that DoD will lose civilian providers to the VA system as they learn that they can earn substantially higher salaries for performing essentially the same job.” Given the concern about retention of psychologists and medical professionals, Rep. McNerney’s bill doubles the amount of psychologist and non-physician health care provider specialty pay. Current pay in this category ranges from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per year.

7.□□ □ Service as member of Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team

The term “Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Support Team” means a team of members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces in support of emergency preparedness programs to prepare for or to respond to any emergency involving the use of a weapon of mass destruction. Increases from \$150 to \$300 per month.

8.□□ □ Members extending duty at designated locations overseas

Pay for a service member who has completed a tour of duty at a location outside the continental United States who, at the end of that tour of duty, executes an agreement to extend that tour for a period of not less than one year. Increased from \$80 month or \$2,000 lump sum per year to \$200 per month or \$3,000 lump sum yearly payment.